

NTU, NHG Health launch work-study programme to boost number of clinical psychologists in S'pore

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The three-year programme will start in August 2026, with its first batch of students expected to graduate in 2029.

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Summary

- NTU and NHG Health launch a work-study Master's programme to combat clinical psychologist shortages in Singapore
- The Aspire programme offers a unique psychopharmacology module and integrates 340 annual supervised clinical hours towards psychologist registration.

- Associate psychologists gain practical experience managing complex cases while studying

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SINGAPORE - To increase the number of clinical psychologists in Singapore as the country makes mental health a priority, Nanyang Technological University and NHG Health have introduced a programme for psychologists and healthcare professionals to earn a master's degree while remaining in the workforce.

The three-year programme will start in August 2026, with its first batch of students expected to graduate in 2029.

Associate psychologists provide mental health support for clients who have milder mental health conditions. They cannot support highly distressed clients completely on their own, but as students in the programme, they will be able to learn this skill in practice under supervision.

Significantly, students will learn to prescribe medication for specific mental health conditions, such as depression, under the training of psychiatrists and pharmacists from the Institute of Mental Health, which is part of the NHG Health cluster.

In Singapore currently, only medically trained doctors and psychiatrists can prescribe medication for mental health conditions.

As the programme developers anticipate that this regulation may change in the future, they are taking a proactive approach by adding a module on restrictive prescribing.

In 2018, the Ministry of Health allowed advanced practice nurses and senior pharmacists to be upskilled to prescribe medication to patients within a framework overseen by doctors.

Clinical psychologists could be allowed to do the same, but a work group will be needed to determine the exact medication that clinical psychologists can safely prescribe, said Professor Tham Kum Ying, assistant dean of graduate programmes, continuing education and training at NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine.

The new programme is called the Applied Specialist Psychology Integrated Residency Education, or ASPIRE.

Students will earn a graduate certificate after completing the first year of the programme, a FlexiMasters certificate after the second, and a Master of Psychology (clinical) degree after the third year.

ASPIRE will cost each student around \$83,000 if they complete the three years.

Singapore is working to increase the number of public-sector psychologists and regulating the profession as part of a broader national effort to strengthen the mental health infrastructure here.

At the March 5 debate on the Ministry of Health's (MOH) budget, Senior Minister of State for Health Koh Poh Koon said the ministry will be registering psychologists in five sub-disciplines – clinical, educational, counselling, forensic psychology and clinical neuropsychology. The detailed schedule, requirements and road maps for the registration will be announced by 2027, he said.

As at April 2, there were 919 psychologists who had voluntarily registered with the Singapore Register of Psychologists (SRP), ahead of impending mandatory registration.

Only psychologists who hold a master's or doctoral degree in applied psychology, with a recognised area of specialisation, such as clinical, counselling, educational, forensic psychology and others, are eligible to be on the SRP, which is managed by the Singapore Psychological Society (SPS).

Earlier in 2026, NTU launched a Master of Science in Psychology programme. But unlike ASPIRE, it is not meant to prepare the graduates to become clinical psychologists and does not meet the SRP's eligibility criteria.

Ms Mavis Seow, head of psychology at the Institute of Mental Health and the course director (clinical) of ASPIRE, said that ASPIRE's emphasis on workplace learning means that students will be able to practise interviewing skills in a micro-skills module, unlike in a traditional programme where students learn about this only in theory.

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In ASPIRE's fully integrated residency model, students will clock 340 hours of supervised clinical practicum each year. These will count towards the 1,000 clinical placement hours required by SPS to become a registered psychologist in Singapore.

Prof Tham said they hope to get 15 to 25 enrolments in the first year of the programme.

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